MUTINY!

A REGULAR NEWSLETTER FROM BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

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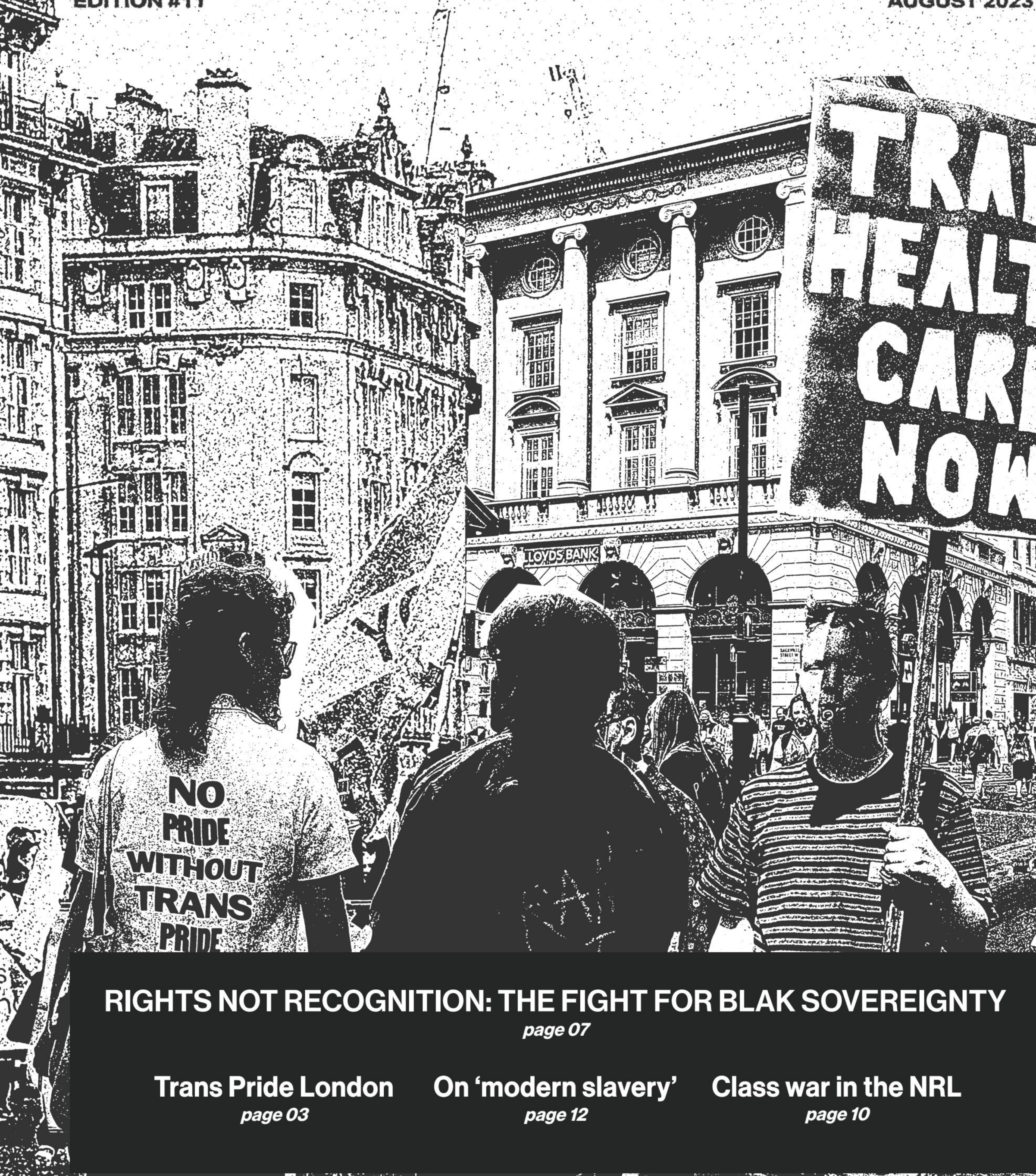

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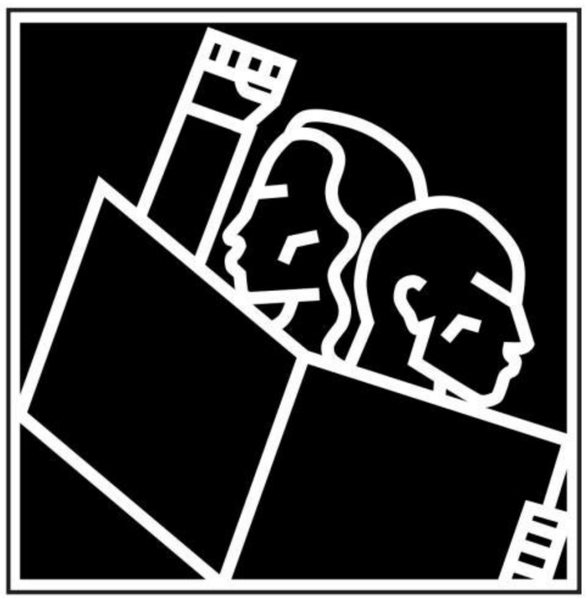
We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we live, work, and organise is unceded Aboriginal land.

We pay our respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, on whose lands Black Flag Sydney is based. We offer our absolute and unequivocal solidarity to all First Nations peoples fighting for liberation, here and overseas.

We stand together now and always.



Editorial

This Winter edition of Mutiny comes to you care of both new and old editors. While the handover hasn't been entirely seamless – it was originally our June, then July, and now just our 'Winter' edition – we're pretty chuffed with the end result. This is a longer edition, with added reports from around the world and extended analysis on key issues.

Both Mutiny's writing and design were important reasons for us new editors joining Black Flag Sydney, and we think this edition has some of the best yet (having squeezed the last life out of this outgoing editor). Not only is Mutiny helpful for us as an organisation to consolidate and share our knowledge and opinions, it is also a practical manifestation of our anarchist values.

As an organisation we strive to strengthen and impart our theoretical understanding of anarcho-communism and, most importantly, to establish these principles as a practical reality in any avenue we are able to. Being created by a free association of producers without any hierarchy (besides the sacred hierarchies of design, of course), Mutiny has been a great exercise for us to embrace anarchist praxis. Although we have a team dedicated to editing Mutiny, it is ultimately produced as a result of extensive discussion amongst all Black Flag members and collaboration across the organisation at each stage of development. While we as editors 'fine tune' the project, it is truly a reflection of the organisation as a whole.

For us, and hopefully for you, this ultimately makes for a more dynamic and informative paper and one we are proud to release into the great socialist milieu.

Trans Pride in London

Forty thousand take to the streets for UK Trans+ Pride 2023

On Saturday, 8 July, around 40,000 protesters gathered at Trafalgar Square, London, for London Trans+ Pride. The afternoon rain deterred nobody as a growing sea of umbrellas populated the area, gathering for what would be the largest Trans rights march in history.

London Trans+ Pride is held by a grassroots community organisation of the same name who is committed to preserving the radical roots of pride, asserting that 'the London Trans+ Pride march is a protest.' They call for 'equality via positive legislative change and radical improvement to our education and public healthcare system to recognise and support the needs of trans people.'

Though the rally didn't seem to have official demands, protesters and speakers sent a clear and radical political message. The rally was staunchly anti-cop, pro-abolition, emphatically countering targeted Tory policies and TERF rhetoric. Members of the community showed up to the march equally as willing to maintain energy and assert a strong political line as the organisers were. In moments of relative silence—megaphones appeared to be scarce in a crowd of that size—it was the community that would elect to lead chants without them.

The unprecedented turnout may have in part boiled down to the high political tensions for trans people in the UK right now: in January, the Tory Government blocked Scotland's Gender Recognition Reform Bill by enforcing a certain section of the Scotland Act for the first time in history. This bill would have made it significantly easier for trans and gender-diverse people in the UK to acquire a gender recognition certificate necessary for changing the gender marker on their legal identity documents. Targeted attacks of this kind by British conservatives are seemingly emboldening 'gender critical' fanatics and trans exclusionary hate speech spouted by the likes of Kellie-Jay Keen and Julia Long.

Apart from these culture wars, British queer people are falling victim to healthcare disparities: access to NHS gender-affirming care is hard to come by in the UK, with some people reporting waiting years before being allowed access to hormones. As a result, trans and gender-diverse people are forced to illegally source medication themselves or leave the UK. A gender recognition certificate for self-identification can only be issued after an appointment with a 'gender specialist' (barred behind these gruelling wait times) and a psychiatrist.

This is during a housing and cost-of-living crisis that, in London as in Sydney, disproportionately affects queer people. The resulting rage from the community was consistently felt throughout the two-kilometre-long march to The Green Park. Across one and a half hours, the energy never waned. Thousands chanted, 'Bottoms, tops, we all hate cops!' And 'trans people say abolition, no pride in cops, no pride in prisons!' As we passed Piccadilly Circus and rain clouds parted for the sun. Taking part in a rally so large and expressive was galvanising in itself. Ties to the Black Lives Matter movement were frequently made with placards. Pride was embodied by protesters who marched hand-in-hand, or shirtless, wearing scrubs, or full drag. London Trans+ Pride demonstrated the potential for community solidarity in defence of trans rights, and the capacity for young queer people to consciously counter the bigoted forces that try to stifle them.

A slate of ten speakers spoke from the Wellington Arch in The Green Park after a seemingly endless stream of protestors flooded onto the grass. The feeling at the end of the march was celebratory. The energy garnered by the march remained long after it was over.

British and Australian queers alike feel the effects of culture wars, of healthcare and housing disparity, of a Pride movement backed by large corporations and alienated from the community, and of a government often unwilling to instigate legislative change. London Trans+ Pride this year was the largest in history, but as queer activists and anarchists in Sydney it is up to us to incite struggle in the hopes of building a radical movement for queer liberation to this scale and beyond.

REPORT AND PHOTOS FROM BLACK FLAG SYDNEY'S CURRENT LONDON CORRESPONDENT

NTEU strikes conclude at the University of Sydney

Lessons from unionists involved in Australia's longest university strike campaign

THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED University of Sydney enterprise agreement industrial campaign was one of the most contested in higher education, leading to a record nine strike days. Anarchists in conjunction with other socialists were closely involved in the campaign which, despite not leading to all the gains which the left desired, resulted in some key wins – such as gender affirmation leave, workload protections, and sick pay for casuals, as well as defense of existing conditions that University management were determined to strip away. The campaign offers a number of lessons for the socialist labour movement both within and outside higher education. Here we attempt to reflect on the industrial campaign and what it might mean for future labour militancy both on and off campus.

THE CONTEXT

The 2021-2023 University of Sydney industrial campaign was heavily flavoured by the recent Covid-19 lockdowns with many classes on Zoom, and job losses due to universities crying poor over not being paid JobKeeper despite largely making a surplus. This especially harmed casuals and workers on temporary contracts, who could be easily discarded by management.

Management took a more hostile but less confrontational approach to bargaining than previously. The bargaining representatives hired a lawyer from Clayton Utz (a veteran unionbuster) to insulate them from interacting directly with staff representatives, or splintering in front of them. They also took up a strategy of essentially exhausting the membership, by introducing an attack on academic workload allocations (40/40/20) that would initially energise the base. Despite an initially conservative branch bureaucracy, the union struck with high attendance.

THE FIGHT

Soon after the initial strikes, the branch entered into elections and militant unionists formed a ticket called Rank and File Action (RAFA), which won close to a majority on branch committee and half of the bargaining team. This removed a significant obstacle that suppressed militancy in previous strike rounds. Local activists had been elected out of a clear pro-strike vote and were hostile to the manoeuvres of union leadership in previous rounds.

This rank and file militancy led to nine days of strike action, a record in the sector, and also created openings for workers to take more ownership of the union. The branch meetings increased to 700 people toward the end of the campaign, and the branch was one of the only ones in the country to increase its membership. There was also an uptick in regular branch activism, primarily through the network built around RAFA.

The strikes had a very different energy to previous rounds. Zoom presented a real strategic impediment as management sent the majority of classes online in order to by-pass the pickets. The strikes in the past had been successful as even though a minority struck they were able to enforce shut downs through the pickets. The issue of scab Zoom classes was partially remedied through positive innovations like zoom picketing, and the slow return to in-person learning, but was never completely resolved.

STUDENT SOLIDARITY SPUTTERS

The other different element to pickets is that student solidarity was marginal compared to previous rounds. There were almost no unaligned students who attended the pickets, and multiple staff in the union report never seeing a student do announcements to their class in almost two years of bargaining. Actions outside of strike days were also almost unheard of, though ideas of general meetings were floated a few times.

Activist students certainly made efforts to demonstrate solidarity with striking staff, erecting barricades and manning key pickets during strike days, leading the improvised response to Zoom strike-breaking, and building support for the campaign through general leafletting and announcements. However, these efforts fell short and were unable to mobilise the masses of students who have previously supported strike waves on campus. The comparitively diminished and isolated nature of the student union (relative to its more influential past), as well as prevailing conditions which have pressured students out of activism generally, are likely at the core of the valiant, but insufficient student response to the strikes. Student activists would do well to consider the value of organising students under faculty or school committees in future, not simply in strike years but as a general union principle for driving democratic engagement on campus.

ESCALATION AND AGITATION

Over the course of the campaign an argument was put amongst branch activists about how to escalate beyond the pickets, which diverged into three camps: 1) escalate into marking bans to disrupt University profits; 2) make each strike longer; 3) settle with the university. Marking bans slowly disappeared from the debate through a mixture of lack of confidence on when to raise the issue to general membership, but also through an error on how to authorise it under the Fair Work laws.

This narrowed the strategic debate amongst members into a referendum on strikes, and if additional strikes would necessarily gain more. A clear timeline of gains could be observed - including serious advances like sick pay for casuals - but existing continuing staff who were exhausted from two years of conflict were being offered protection for their workloads, despite no such protections being offered for new employees. Settlement became more attractive than an argument that the next strikes would be bigger and better if they built them.

The branch also never truly reckoned with the divisions caused by divergent material interests amongst members in such a diverse workforce as a university, and how those divisions would play towards settlement. Senior academics with financial and job security could

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ensure that their key issue of 40/40/20 became a redline issue, but their comfortable position in the hierarchy left many with little interest in pushing for the concerns of those lower in the order. Casual and precarious staff had the most reason for militancy, but that same precarity made ongoing striking increasingly financially difficult and increased susceptibility to a transient but immediate $2000 reward for resolution. While combining both academic and professional staff together in a single industrial union rather than separate trade unions is a key point of NTEU strength, it also increased faultlines for professional staff to feel that their concerns were under-represented.

This also occurred in the context of new industrial legislation passed by Labor and the Greens, with endorsement from NTEU leaders. The legislation was brought up in a scare campaign by officials, as it would apparently force unionists into arbitration in another month with unknown impacts. While the truth of this is arguable, it was a factor that dented confidence for workers for whom the question had become solely: will the next strike win everything in this next month?

The branch also faced the issue of lack of support from the national and state offices, though in a less obvious way than previous years. Despite all universities entering into bargaining at similar times the division refused to coordinate them, also refusing to resource any effort to re-ballot to put marking bans back on the table to rectify administrative bungles, or give access to member lists for turnout when needed.

THE FUTURE?

There have been genuine steps forward for the branch at University of Sydney, but arguably it was close to the limit of what it could achieve at this stage of organisation. The bureaucracy and their invocation of the rigged industrial relations laws were a problem, but ultimately the branch was at a point in 2023 where it was won over politically to these concerns.

Removing the obstacle of the local bureaucracy actively rigging the process against the campaign simplified the process and opened things up for member participation. It's unlikely the branch membership would have had the capacity to fight both management and the officials for two years. An important factor in this is also that the branch committee were elected by their co-workers during a strike with a caucus structure, which put its own militant pressure on the elected activists.

The Zoomification of the university also opens up a question of what a strike can do in the public education sector. Most strikes are a disruption of profits for a firm, and while strikes at Sydney University disrupt operations they do not have an immediately observable impact on profits for management.

The most obvious harm it can cause for a University is reputational damage as this flows on to donations from patrons or decreased enrolments that bring them government funding, compared to a business that often has a just-in-time profit model which a strike applies pressure to. While gains are definitely made due to strike action, and the largest management concessions came directly after the strongest strikes, staff are not starving the University's bottom line directly by striking for a week.

Zoom learning makes this more stark because the symbol of the empty campus imposed by the pickets is troubled. Is campus empty due to us or management? This is something that would be simple to answer if the worksite had 80% union membership, but you can never really be sure in a situation of minority unionism. It also lends to people sometimes seeing a strike as a moral exercise that they intellectually support, rather than a concrete attack on management.

A way in which this symbolic nature of the strike was sharpened in the previous 2013 round of bargaining was that students helped make it unpredictable due to their direct action. The campaign became polarised, and management could not protect its reputation in the eyes of prospective enrolments whose parents didn't want their children to study medicine at a place with shit learning conditions where riot cops might kick them. The student movement needs to rebuild and determine whether they organise students for mass action or mobilise pre-existing student activists for smaller actions.

This rebuild is not something unionists can rely on. The student solidarity campaign for 2021-23 was something of a failure, but just as students cannot substitute for staff, staff cannot substitute for students. As a branch, the union needs to consider how it can build a density such that strikes completely disrupt the university despite online strike breaking. The branch must also consider how it gains the capacity to disrupt the profit of the university through things like marking bans, without relying on students doing mass action outside of the Fair Work Act, or support from division in assisting with compliance.

Lastly, the nature of union membership needs to deepen. It is impressive that branch meetings have grown to this unprecedented size, but for most members this means little opportunity to speak about their issues and connect with co-workers. It's no substitute to setting up local area meetings with delegate structures, and building a stronger base amongst the casuals who make up the majority of the workforce on campus. The building of this structure allows clearer spaces to discuss and debate a campaign against management in a large worksite.

Outside of a few ideologically-aligned academic disciplines, membership is diffuse across faculties (and campuses) with minimal interaction, and for many staff the battles of the pickets seem far removed from their daily work. Tying wins on the pickets to concrete improvements in work life is key to building the arguments for militant unionism amongst disengaged white-collar workers. Local organising meetings can provide the opportunity for militants to fight around enforcing the EBA, and to expose the illusions members have in the settlement. Unionists can identify both the advances and limitations of the union by directly fighting management's systemic violation of the agreement which is certain to continue, on issues like wage theft and discrimination.

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Uprising against police murder in France

Our report and translation of the statement from the Union Communiste Libertaire

ON THE MORNING OF THE 27TH of June in the city of Nanterre, a young French boy of Arab descent named Nahel was murdered by police during a traffic stop. After initial claims from the police that the boy tried to ram them, video footage was released demonstrating clearly that the police were never at any risk of danger, and that the cops shot him at point-blank range.

This triggered days of rioting in cities across the country, of an intensity not seen since 2005 – when two boys, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, were killed in the course of a police chase. Despite the cop who fired the shot being detained and charged with homicide, the protests have continued. His mother, who has no other children, is a leader in the protests.

In many respects, Nahel was of a similar profile to victims of police harassment in Sydney: an "ethnic", in and out of school, working casual jobs while attempting to secure an electrical trade, "known to the police" and spending his free time playing for a rugby league club. France's banlieues are also similar to suburbs in Sydney like Fairfield: deprived of decent jobs, accommodation, healthcare and schools, they are populated by migrants from all over the world, their residents exploited between low-paid jobs and the miserable welfare system.

Police brutality and capitalism go hand in hand, and the same system that brutalises workers in France is the same system that brutalises workers in Australia. In the rising of France's exploited against the forces of law and order, we can see the force that will put an end to the police and to capitalism. We express our solidarity with the protestors in France and with the family of Nahel by supporting anti-racist and anti-colonial resistance in our part of the world.

POLICE MURDER: JUSTICE FOR NAHEL AND ALL VICTIMS

Statement from the Union Communiste Libertaire, 28/6/23

His name was Nahel, and he was seventeen years old. Nahel died on the 27th of June in his car when he was shot at point blank range by a police officer after refusing to comply with an order. He was in a bus lane and tried to flee after being threatened with death by the officer, who was already pointing his gun at him.

The police immediately adopted the version of events whereby the car had rammed into the police, while the media were quick to mention the victim's criminal record. However, video footage of the scene shows that the officers were on the side of the car, which was initially stationary, and that their lives were therefore not at risk at any time.

The rationale is the same every time this scenario repeats itself: to show that it was a bad person, a "delinquent" or a person with little "social integration". On the one hand, the media pass on this information without checking it, and it is often a lie or exaggeration. On the other, and more important, even if the claims were true, this in no way justifies murder, nor can it be used as mitigating circumstances for the intention to cause death. The sole purpose of this narrative is to establish and normalise policy impunity in cases of racist crime. Again and again, without the presence of a video, the victim's word is worthless. Or, more precisely, it is worthless when it is a member of law enforcement in the dock, even if it is something that happens frequently.

This is no less than the thirteenth homicide perpetrated by law enforcement following a refusal to comply since the start of the year. Only five of the thirteen police officers responsible have been charged, the others so far having been released without prosecution. This is an exceptional figure, which is not unrelated to the 2017 law modifying the rights of police officers to use their weapons. We shouldn't be surprised to see a rise in violence, particularly racist violence, when terms like "decivilisation", "great replacement" or "ensavagement" are used at the highest levels of government, when discriminatory laws are passed or put to a vote. What is the purpose of policy that appropriates the themes of white supremacists?

This racism of the state reaches its culmination in its institutions, in this case the police. The violence it engenders is permitted and tolerated by the powers that be, who are quick to point the finger at the extreme left and extreme right, as they did after the attack on the mayor of Saint-Brévin, following the establishment of a centre for asylum seekers in his town.

Let's not delude ourselves. If the police officer took the liberty of pulling the trigger at point-blank range, it was because he didn't think there would be any consequences; it was because, in his view, Nahel's life was worthless – in his eyes, and in the eyes of society.

Can we still put the blame for police killings solely on individuals? Was he just a bad cop? No! The rhetoric that speaks of the problem of an individual who simply committed a "blunder" is untenable. It is nothing but a form of racism that the state pretends not to see, and which in fact authorises killing. There is an urgent need for radical criticism of the national police force – a racist and colonial institution, stricken by the gangrene of the extreme right, terrorising a whole section of the population with the utmost impunity. Victims of the racism of the police have been denouncing it for years. The denial of their fundamental rights is not because of their activism or their opposition to a reform such as that of the pension system; the simple fact of existing forces them to deal with it. Refugees in particular suffer from this violence, whether in the cemetery that the Mediterranean has become, in Calais, in Mayotte, or in the administrative detention centres where Mohamed, a fifty nine year old man, died a month ago, after being beaten by police officers. These crimes are part of a long list that goes back forty years, if not more (we remember the mass crimes of the 17th of October 1961). Many names come to mind: Malik Oussekine, Abdel Benahya, Zied and Bouna, Moshin and Lakhamy, Akim Ajimi, Ali Ziri, Mamadou Marega, Wissam el-Yamni, Amine Bentousi, Angelo Garan, Gaye Camara, Liu Shaoyao, Babacar Gaye, Steve Maya Caniço, Claude Jean-Pierre, and many more. . . Since the strong protests demanding truth and justice for Adama Traoré – whose family suffered an unbelievable amount of repression for five years – and three years after the worldwide protests for George Floyd, the only "responses" from the state have been refusals.

In the current context of generalised repression, we believe that the revolts that began in Nanterre are an integral part of the social movement. It is a question of demanding justice and truth for Nahel and the other victims of police crime, and we join in these demands. Our thoughts are with the relatives of the victims of these police murders.
In the immediate term, we demand justice and truth for Nahel, the repeal of the Global Security and Separatism Acts, and the disarmament of the police.

In the face of racism and police unity: popular unity!

FEATURE

Rights *not* Recognition

The fight for Blak sovereignty

Constitutional recognition has its roots in the Howard-era, long before the Voice came to be. John Howard and his Liberal government exhibited a craving for culture wars that could stoke a stronger white Australian identity. This would range from border-force patriotism with the war on terror and the 'children overboard' refugee panic, to a pro-colonial nationalism based on false allegations about Blak paedophile rings, a revival of Australia Day and ANZAC Day, and history wars insisting that Australia was not built upon genocide and that this should not be taught in schools. One of his final nation building proposals was a promise of a referendum for constitutional recognition, in the hope of uniting Australia behind one national identity and quashing debate over treaties.

The referendum proposal floundered somewhat after Howard's loss to Kevin Rudd in 2007, but Labor would collaborate with the Liberals in passing constitutional recognition in each state government and commissioned an inquiry. The inquiry resolved that any referendum must include bans on discrimination against Blak people, which the government ignored in favour of setting up a front group called 'Recognise' with the support of several corporations. Recognise would come to be protested by Blak militants after allegations of falsifying support for constitutional recognition amongst Blak people, and eventually Recognise lost momentum during the subsequent years under Tony Abbott's Liberal government.

Concerned by the collapse of Recognise, Reconciliation Australia would try to rescue the constitutional recognition proposal through a convention near Uluru in 2017. The process started with invite-only regional 'dialogues', which were in fact largely apathetic toward Voice and recognition, if not openly hostile towards the proposals. These unrepresentative regional dialogues elected 60% of the delegates to the Uluru convention. The remaining 40% of delegates were appointed by the government and NGOs funded by Recognise. The convention was protested by left-wing delegates who declared the process corrupt, and released their own statement calling for treaties and sovereignty as an alternative to the Statement from the Heart working group's demand for a binding Voice.

The Statement from the Heart working group's submission for a binding Voice has been comprehensively ignored by the Labor party and 'progressive' capitalists, who have aligned behind a front group called 'From the Heart' which includes such staunch Indigenous allies as the Minerals Council of Australia. This group has insisted on a powerless advisory Voice in order to appeal to white moderates, and to make declarations of unanimous Blak support for this proposal. The proposal as outlined gives the government of the day a say over how members of a Voice are elected (or not), ensures they have no further rights to communicate with the government than any citizen, and prohibits discussion by the Voice on issues that are deemed irrelevant like the fracking and mining of their land without their consent.

It is suggested by Labor politicians like Linda Burney that this Voice would be able to encourage the government to send more police into the Northern Territory to restrict Blak people from drinking, which invites concerns about how the Voice will be used by the government to justify racist decisions. The backing that the Voice has received from Labor's corporate donors in the fossil fuel industry, who are currently in conflict with Blak people for access to their land, also raises alarm bells. And the degree to which this process has been manufactured by the ruling class does not bode well for how representative the Voice is intended to be in practice.

The only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from this sequence of events is that we should extend our solidarity to the left-wing critics of this process amongst the Blak community, and reject the idea that this referendum proposal is a genuine call for representation. We do not need to take political advice from Albanese, and instead we should seek our answers from those who fight for land rights embedded in treaties.

From the Barunga Statement to the Blak Greens and the Walkout Collective

Blak peoples have resisted colonisation since the violent invasion of 1788, and have been clear at every conflict and protest since in the demand for land rights and self-determination. In 1988, 200 years following invasion, the Hawke Labor government committed to treaty making following the receipt of the Barunga Statement and that it would be completed by 1990. It has been 43 years since Labor made that promise, and like the Liberals

> **A major mobilisation around the core struggles of the Blak liberation movement is critical after the results of the referendum are confirmed, whether Yes or No.**

they've continued to oversee the violation of every demand in the Barunga Statement.

The Barunga Statement outlined a proposal for self-determination through an end to police violence and child theft in favour of community justice, land rights and reparations, the return of ancestral belongings, a respect for culture, and support for their right to democratic self-governance. There have been many statements and formulations since that time, and most recently that's included the 2022 Yuendumu Statement calling for defunding and disarmament of police in favour of funding for services in the community. These statements and approaches by Blak activists have largely been resisted by the government which wishes to engage in treaty making on its own terms, or not at all.

After the Uluru Convention, from which the Statement from the Heart emerged, the left-wing delegates who walked out cohered around their own statement as the Walkout Collective. They have called for a truth telling process that reveals the trauma and injustices of Australian settlement followed by a treaty making process between different First Nations, and then the Australian government which may lead into a united republic. A number of these delegates and their supporters would end up entering the Blak Greens, who initiated their own campaign for Truth, Treaty, and Voice based on the ideas of the Walkout Collective, which was endorsed by the broader Greens membership and taken to the 2022 election as an alternative to Albanese's proposal.

This politics was also expressed in the 2023 Invasion Day mass protests, which in Sydney called for a No vote in the referendum in alignment with the case for Truth and Treaty before Voice. The federal Greens leadership has since made an effort to quash and silence this with moderate MPs making efforts to leak to the media and undermine campaigning for treaties, suppressing documentation from the Blak Greens, and ultimately breach their own policy by shifting to an uncritical Yes to Albanese's Voice proposal. Their Indigenous Affairs spokesperson, Lidia Thorpe, shortly left the party and it's unclear what the next step is by advocates in the campaign as the date of the referendum slowly approaches.

While there are limits to the effectiveness of treaty making between an oppressed people and the nation state which oppresses them, the argument for Truth and Treaty before Voice constitutes a left-wing break from liberal approaches towards First Nations justice. It should not be dismissed. It is something we see as not just a principled rejection of a corrupt political project, but a staunch insistence that land rights and an end to police brutality and child theft are urgent demands that should not be delayed. It is an insistence that demands such as kicking Santos out of the Pilliga must be met immediately. There can be nothing more principled than standing alongside Blak comrades in these struggles, and refusing to concede.

LESSONS FROM THE MARRIAGE EQUALITY PLEBISCITE

The liberal commentariat has been near orgiastic in their comparisons between the marriage equality postal survey and the Voice referendum, and have been desperately throwing themselves into the conversation with advice on why the campaign should be as small a target in messaging as possible. It seems Albanese is on the same page as he desperately assures the right of how useless the Voice will be at every turn, while the right itself is split between the delusional bigots who are convinced the Voice is a Blak dictatorship, and those who are entranced by the wonders of new 'inclusive' nationalism.

Many people are concerned that challenging the Voice in any way will bolster the confidence of those bigots convinced that a new Blak empire is arising through the referendum, and that they should not speak up. There is also the very real concern that the true face for a No campaign in Australia is Peter Dutton, Jacinta Price, and Pauline Hanson, and so any momentum for No will be a validation of their hard-right politics and will give an extra boost of confidence to every closet white supremacist with a gun. This is the shit sandwich that Albanese has given Blak people.

The real lesson from the marriage equality postal survey is that a victory for Yes at the ballot does not itself undermine the sense of confidence that bigots gain from being confirmed by their peers. The result of the postal survey was a victory, but the local win for No in western Sydney laid the basis for a confidently bigoted layer of hard-right activists that most recently performed a gay bashing outside of a One Nation event. This was able to happen as the mainstream wing of the marriage equality campaign, sponsored as it was by big business, refused to engage with the scare mongering about trans rights and schools. They made being a small target into a virtue, just as Albanese is attempting to do.

A small layer of revolutionaries quietly voting Yes in urban centres will not make a dent in the confidence of right-wing No voters who work in a prison in western Sydney or regional NSW; even if the referendum succeeds, these pockets of racism will thrive, emboldened by the bigots who use the national debate as an opportunity to spread fear and misinformation unchallenged by weak, small-target Yes campaigners. Fighting this will require us to actually stand with Blak militants in the streets who are raising the real questions of land rights and sovereignty – such as the Gomeroi people who have voted against fracking of their land. We must help to build the big targets that actually cut against these racist ideas, and to win them through united protest and struggle.

QUEER AND BLAK RESISTANCE TO CORPORATE CONTROL

The other clear lesson that should be drawn out of comparing struggles is that we have a common enemy – the ruling class – who use similar strategies to keep us divided. Much like the labour movement, the social movements of the 60s and 70s represented a challenge that needed to be smothered, and 'progressive' capital has made a concerted effort to co-opt, divide, and disempower resistance.

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) was founded in 1983 to politically intervene in the new terrain of neoliberalism under Labor. The BCA represents the political will of the wealthiest companies in the country who control billions in assets, control the wages and conditions of countless workers, and are responsible for the bulk of corporate donations to the Labor, Liberal, and National parties in this country. BCA affiliates also populate the boards of many lobby groups and cultural events in the LGBTI and Aboriginal sectors with their CEOs, collectively inject millions into these projects while promoting their brands, and often claim these organisations as policy advocates to the political parties they also fund.

The most obvious of these for the queer community

is the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG), which has its origins as a grassroots protest against police violence, but now receives millions in corporate donations with branding everywhere. The police take a role of prominence in each festival while companies like Qantas are celebrated, despite making use of slavery in the prison system and having cracked down on union campaigns for gender neutral staff uniforms. The various Pride parades across the country are estimated to receive over $6 million in corporate donations each year which makes them the subject of both protest and mockery by the queer community. WearItPurple, a youth support network, works closely with the police and is funded by the Commonwealth Bank and Telstra. BlaQ is funded by Apple and Calvin Klein. ACON's 'Pride in Diversity' program has been funded by the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Defence, KPMG, Lendlease, ING, IBM, and Goldman Sachs; though it is meant to advocate for good conditions for queer workers, it has union-busting legal firm Clayton Utz as its best-rated 'inclusive' workplace.

Most significantly, though, is the example of Equality Australia – an NGO sponsored by the ruling class intended to speak for a marginalised community. Equality Australia is the main consultant to the political class on what queer people think, yet it is run directly by CEOs, taking in over a million dollars of donations every year. Its board has been populated by the heads of WestPac, directors of Woolworths and the National party, owners of airports and property management companies, and even representatives from the Department of Corrections, and the controversial colleges at Sydney University. One of their next big ideas to offer Labor is a gay version of the Voice, an unelected 'representative' council, to reassure the government that our oppressive legal system is inclusive. Only peer-run sex worker organisations as a rule seem to not be reliant on corporate funding.

This landscape has created a circuit of inaction: unelected leaders of the movement, guided by corporate KPIs rather than grassroots community support, go begging to disinterested politicians who are funded by the same corporations, while big business manically promotes itself in queer cultural spaces despite undermining queer rights in the workplace.

These same corporations invented Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) as a substitute for genuine union demands like Blak jobs. Corporate CEOs sit on the boards of organisations like Reconciliation Australia, which was chaired by the CEO of Woodside while the corporation imposed a gas hub on the land of the Jabirr Jabirr and Goolarabooloo peoples. 'Jawun', founded by Noel Pearson in collaboration with Westpac to build links between Blak peoples and corporations, has a board mostly sourced from BCA-aligned corporations and has taken a prominent role in smothering dissent to fossil fuel extraction, land sales, the cultural appropriation of artefacts, and other issues. Jawun has lobbied against environmental protections so as to free up land to be sold off by Land Councils, and associated law firms like Allens played a key role in authoring the idea of constitutional recognition.

Pearson's Jawun in particular has made an effort to present Native Title as an economic opportunity rather than a step toward sovereignty, encouraging the sale of land to big business as a way for local communities to empower themselves, while businesses supposedly create jobs for all in construction, coal, and gas. Jawun happily enables this process by offering corporate advisers from BCA-aligned companies to advise Land Councils on the best means by which to sell off and develop land. In 2004 Jawun helped to provide the Darkinjung Land Council with 'assistance' from Westpac, KPMG, CBA, NAB, Telstra, Woolworths Liquor Group and more during a sell off process. This is a process being rolled out across the country to change Blak people from sovereigns into aspiring capitalists, or hyper-exploited workers.

It is in this context that we need to understand the corporate strategy around Recognition and the Voice, and any comparisons with the marriage equality campaign. Marriage equality was a grassroots demand that gained traction through protests that corporations never supported. These corporations finally gave way, offering tepid support in the form of a Yes campaign that was so small a target that it helped transphobia fester in No voting electorates. Recognition, on the other hand, is an example of a corporate proposal that is being manufactured by the corporations themselves, and is being made a priority despite being consistently opposed by Blak militants and disregarded by Aboriginal communities seeking real material change to life in the colony. Recognition is not a step towards liberation, it is a move against Blak sovereignty by the corporations who try to silence, co-opt and exploit Blak people and queer people alike, and by a Labor party seeking to sell-out communities for political capital.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Our perspective is that as militants our focus should not be on door knocking to get out the vote alongside either the white supremacists or the corporations, but on building struggle within the framework of Truth and Treaty before Voice as the only existing left-wing alternative. While we believe this is most logically expressed in a No vote in the referendum – a point which should not be veiled or ignored – this is perhaps the least important aspect of the campaign which should be focused squarely on struggles like the fight of the Gomeroi people against Santos. A major mobilisation around the core struggles of the Blak liberation movement is critical after the results of the referendum are confirmed, whether Yes or No. We will be organising with our Indigenous comrades to ensure such an action gets off the ground in as strong and as militant a manner as possible, to put a pin in the racist referendum discourse and build a real fight towards sovereignty.

An important element of the demands by left critics of the Voice is that truth telling is crucial, and that this involves accepting uncomfortable realities that we may not always enjoy hearing. Our belief is that there are many leftists who are critical of the Voice and accept that land rights should not be put on hold, but are terrified of being marginalised by white liberals. We cannot as a movement proceed forward in dealing with the uncomfortable truth of genocide if we are unwilling to deal with the discomfort of liberal confusion and disapproval.

"A small layer of revolutionaries quietly voting Yes in urban centres will not make a dent in the confidence of right-wing No voters... Fighting this will require us to actually stand with Blak militants in the streets."

Class war comes alive in the NRL

The history and context of current union struggles in the Footy

THE PROTRACTED INDUSTRIAL dispute between the National Rugby League and footballers organised through the Rugby League Players' Association (RLPA) has come to a head, with the decision of the RLPA to place a work ban on players' media obligations. At minimum, this means no pre-game, post-game and halftime interviews. The work ban will encompass State of Origin III, one of the biggest media spectacles in Australia.

Predictably, this led to the NRL CEO Andrew Abdo putting on a brave face and declaring that the NRL "won't be bullied or we won't be threatened". It also provoked the NRL media into a frenzy. The media, chief among them News Corp/Fox and Nine/Fairfax, are by far the largest financial contributors to the NRL through their eye-watering broadcast rights deals, and hurting them is a roundabout but effective way of targeting the NRL.

The thin veneer of journalistic independence on the part of the press has given way to an all out assault on the RLPA. Witness the usually jokey Matthew Johns suddenly turning serious on his Fox talk show, and mourning that the player boycott "will only hurt the fans". In his mind, they are desperate to watch his contrived banter; in actual fact, most of them despise the NRL media. The most reasonable – and revealing – media comment on the dispute came from Matthew's brother Andrew, when he stated on a poorly-watched web series that the work ban was being driven by the players, not the RLPA board. Opponents of the RLPA point to the high salaries and celebrity lifestyles of some of the players as proof that their position is untenable, to try and convince ordinary people not to sympathise with or support the players' demands. The RLPA is adamant that it is looking out for the current and future interests of the players. What's actually going on?

WHAT IS THE DISPUTE ABOUT?

The dispute between the RLPA and the NRL is over the details of the next Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The CBA is an agreement between the NRL and the RLPA representing the players, who are formally employed by their specific clubs on a variety of contracts. This will be the first CBA to be active in the period of the most recent NRL-broadcaster agreement, which provides for around $115m in funding per annum until the end of 2027. The NRL is a non-profit body, but that doesn't matter very much. Like all entities under capitalism, it is afflicted by a desire to make as much money as possible. Like other businesses, it has a competitor driving it to be more aggressive: namely, the AFL, who have advanced beyond the NRL by signing a much more lucrative deal with the broadcasters. In other words – the dispute is no different in essence to any other dispute between employers, who want to work their employees harder for less, and employees, who want to work less for more.

The dispute has largely progressed beyond salaries: by the RLPA's own admission, it has not asked for "a dollar more" in wages since accepting the NRL's modified proposal on the matter in December of last year. Instead, the dispute has revolved around different issues, including a proposed hardship fund for injured players whose medical needs extend beyond the year of support guaranteed by the existing set-up. The RLPA is also pushing for the first CBA for women footballers.

> **"Class war is a power struggle – and it's no different within rugby league. The details under contention should not be taken in isolation, but in the context of a much wider dispute about control over the future of the sport."**

Class war is a power struggle – and it's no different within rugby league. The details under contention should not be taken in isolation, but in the context of a much wider dispute about control over the future of the sport. Indeed, several of the RLPA's key demands relate to footballers being incorporated into administrative decision-making. The NRL naturally resists this since it knows that its interest in making money will necessarily conflict with the interests of footballers.

Footballers: workers in uniform

It's certainly true that professional footballers earn a lot of money. The top players can earn beyond $1m a year and the minimum wage for first grade players is currently $120 000 (the RLPA wants it to be $150 000). This amount of money insulates them from immediate cost of living pressures and allows higher earning players to buy property, amass investments and launch businesses that will sustain them after they retire.

However, this needs to be put into context. The average professional footballer is not a star – the average NRL career is less than forty five games, which is around two seasons. Most commonly, a professional footballer will spend a few years floating around reserve grade, play a few years worth of first grade, and then float back to reserve grade or the English competition before effectively re-entering the working class life they tend to come from. This isn't even getting into the many more players at youth level and in the lower grades who don't even come close to getting into the NRL.

Every professional rugby league player is acutely aware of how their careers can be cut down in a flash, rendering them not just unable to play football but to work altogether. All footballers know about Mose Masoe, whose spine was crushed in a freak tackle, and was nearly left paraplegic. All footballers know about Alex McKinnon, who was crushed in a similar tackle and was left paraplegic. That's just the extreme end, but all footballers suffer aches and pains of varying intensity. Injections of painkillers during games are routine, and a significant number of footballers rely on more painkillers and sleeping pills in order to actually rest. As the players retire and age, many are so stricken by pain that they turn to heavier, addictive, opioid-based painkillers.

The brain condition chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) looms large over all professional sports, and rugby league is no exception. Awareness of CTE in the past decade or two has risen drastically, and lawsuits filed against professional sports bodies by players and players' association have terrified sports administrators into cracking down on things like high tackles and punches to the head. Now, practically all contact to

the head of the player is penalised, and the impacted player is usually taken off the field for a head injury assessment. If they fail the assessment, they cannot return to the field.

However, the implementation of these sorts of game-changing rules may well end up being pointless. The largest study of CTE to date was recently published, and it concluded that the cumulative force of impacts was the key factor in predicting CTE, not concussions. In other words, it's not knocks to the head that matter, but knocks in general. That puts the hit-up, the basic building block of rugby league, into question.

> **"In a conflict between workers and their employers, we don't have to think about what side to take. Fuck the NRL and their sponsors – the players deserve to milk them for all they're worth. If the players are able to accomplish that, then the working class NRL audience may well be inspired to apply that ethos in their own workplaces."**

Financially, it may even render contact sports unviable, as the costs of insuring players rises above the amount of money available.

A certain number of footballers are absorbed into the cluster of rugby league related jobs, as coaches, developmental officers, player welfare managers and so on, but most go back to civilian working class life. NRL juniors are now required to undertake a trade or attend university, but this is hardly an effective means of getting out of the working class!

THE LIMITS OF THE RLPA

In the past year or so, the RLPA has been able to project its voice louder than it has in the past. This isn't just an outcome of the fracture in its relationship with the NRL, but a reflection of years of growth. While players previously regarded the RLPA as not doing very much, it now has a strong degree of support. The RLPA possesses an extensive delegate structure with multiple representatives in each club, at least in first grade. Its smaller scale efforts at mobilising – like the coordinated flooding of Instagram with blank teal tiles earlier this year – are adhered to by players en masse. In other words, its current strength is a reflection of its ability to organise the players. However, this strength is only relative, and it is a fraction of what it could be. This is due to the limitations of the RLPA itself – rather than being a trade union, it is classed as a professional association, and is seen as such by its officials.

The shift away from a union model to a professional model was decided in the mid-2000s, after the RLPA concluded their first CBA under the tenure of former Newcastle prop Tony Butterfield. Butterfield, who had the RLPA registered as a trade union, worked with the rest of the union movement, and fought a hard campaign to secure the first CBA, was followed by Matthew Rodwell. Rodwell reversed course and instead signed a sweetheart deal with the NRL – the key component of which was the provision of direct funding to the RLPA by the NRL in exchange for the deregistration of the association as a union.

You read that right: the RLPA derives a substantial portion of their income (in the hundreds of thousands of dollars per year) from their employers. This fact explains why the RLPA, until now, has been unwilling to undertake industrial action, despite constant rhetorical "threats" of strikes. It also explains some of the stranger tactical decisions made, like the "peace offer" given to the NRL, whereby any revenue sharing agreement for forecasted profits would only kick in after the NRL raises $300 million in assets – or until the CBA enters its fourth year, whichever comes first. This is not just an industrial olive branch, but a product of the RLPA's "professional association" ideology: a desire to collaborate with employers in the running of their business, for the good of profit.

It's clear that the RLPA has serious drawbacks, but two facts are clear: the NRL is relating to it as if it were a trade union, and the players themselves are relating to it as if it were a trade union. As Andrew Johns said: the industrial actions are being driven by the players themselves. The officials of the RLPA, like the officials of any other union, are caught between their desire to work with the employers, and the pressure of hostile workers from below to get better pay and conditions. Reading between the lines of the statements from RLPA CEO Clint Newtown and Chair Deidre Anderson, it may even be possible that the escalating industrial actions are effectively being forced upon the RLPA by the players.

WHERE TO NOW?

At present, the class conflict is confined within the limits of the RLPA as is, but it may not stay that way. In 2007, player hostility to the RLPA went public when Willie Mason, of all people, advocated for a wildcat strike during State of Origin and declared himself willing to lead it. "How can we expect the RLPA to represent our best interests when it is partially funded by the NRL?", wrote Mason. "The money has compromised our union. . . the RLPA's relationship with the NRL leaves us with one weapon – to strike."

Could this kind of sentiment lead to change within the RLPA? The creation of a separate union body? Extra-union industrial action, like the strike of Nigerian women's soccer players that may soon occur? For now we will limit our speculation and conclude with the obvious: that in a conflict between workers and their employers, we don't have to think about what side to take. Fuck the NRL and their sponsors – the players deserve to milk them for all they're worth. If the players are able to accomplish that, then the working class NRL audience may well be inspired to apply that ethos in their own workplaces.

Class war is baked into rugby league. The sport was founded in England as a working class breakaway from rugby union, and for decades was joined at the hip with the labour movement in Australia in a number of ways. The dynamics of the wider working class influence the development of rugby league – but if the players' industrial campaign succeeds, then it could be rugby league that influences the development of the wider working class.

Understanding 'modern slavery' as a crisis of capitalism

There's really nothing 'modern' about slavery

ACROSS THE WESTERN World, there has been a flurry of concern and subsequent legislation around the scourge of 'modern slavery'. However, the understanding of exactly both the concept and laws designed to prevent it remain unclear, secreted away mostly discussed by bureaucrats, NGOs, and CEOs.

The responses by Federal and State Governments to this issue have been fervent, with both a Federal and a NSW Act being passed in 2018. Beyond the legislative changes, entire new bureaucratic bodies have been established, with a dedicated Commissioner at both a federal and state level.

On its surface, the term modern slavery already raises some questions. What is so 'modern' about it? What is the use of differentiating it from slavery of different eras or different systems?

The definition that is given by the UN Special Rapporteur on modern slavery draws a legal distinction between 'traditional' or chattel slavery and modern slavery. Under traditional slavery, the rights of slave owners were enshrined in law and therefore the practice is legal. Those that participate in modern slavery are either legal companies doing illegal activity or companies which are run by illegal organisations such as organised crime. Modern slavery is distinguished then by the fact that it is conducted beneath the surface of the legal economy, not because it is any different in practice or consequence to more 'traditional' forms of slavery.

Despite its change in legal status, structural incentives for slavery still exist within our economic system. While it shouldn't be understated the importance of the dismantling of a system where political and economic power stemmed from maintaining the legal right to own slaves, this doesn't mean that those who still engage in slave ownership or slave practices have no political representation.

Legal changes to curb slavery are nothing new, whether in the form of regulation or abolition – how effective these methods are is the more important question. As it stands, liberal legal solutions are still failing to address the real cause of slavery across the globe.

The role of Australian capital in shaping the response to modern slavery across the globe is actually relatively outsized. One NGO 'tackling' modern slavery that is responsible for a large amount of reporting and the creation of the Global Slavery Index is 'Walk Free,' which was started by mining magnate Andrew 'Twiggy' Forrest and his daughter Grace Forrest. This is, of course, the same Twiggy Forrest who, while in the process of pillaging the Pilbara for all its resources, had claimed that Aboriginal people were undeserving of welfare.

Even just a cursory read of Walk Free's report on the state of global enslavement of women and girls has you run into some outrageous proposals, including that Lebanon should cancel all working visas for women in the country. A little further down, they gladly feature an essay penned by Yeonmi Park, the grifter par excellence who has built a career on outlandish claims about the North Korean regime, including that they have outlawed the concept of love. What comes into focus from these reports is a great deal of unseriousness from the organisation Walk Free; it is a billionaire's philanthropic smokescreen, either profiling liars or promoting absurd far-right border control policies.

> **"Exploitation in our workplaces and in situations of slavery may differ in degree, but it does not differ in kind. We share a common enemy."**

Despite the personal hypocrisies of Twiggy Forrest, Walk Free's position as an authoritative NGO for research and action on modern slavery earns them meetings with the Pope and positions on panels. Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, the discourse pertaining to modern slavery is dominated by the richest billionaires in our country.

THE NSW MODERN SLAVERY COMMISSIONER

In August 2022, James Cockayne was appointed in the role of NSW Modern Slavery Commissioner, newly set up in the wake of the passing of the 2018 Modern Slavery Act for NSW as a state response to slavery. Cockayne is truly committed to the idea that the elements of modern slavery which make it bad are primarily the ways that it harms the optimal functioning of capitalist markets. In a 2022 presentation Cockayne outlined ways in which he thinks modern slavery leaves society worse off, including 'reduced productivity', 'reduced innovation', and 'weakened multiplier effects' (people not having enough money to stimulate sales of consumer goods).

Cockayne's neoliberal revelations here are not, in fact, new to capitalism in any way. Early capitalists learnt these lessons already when expending the lives of many millions of enslaved people in service of expanding consumer markets. As capitalism has cemented its place as the global economic system, slavery remains its most thorny contradiction: capitalists will always race to the bottom for cheap (or free) labour, yet in doing so they risk destabilising the very cycles of profit which sustain them. What Twiggy Forrest and James Cockayne cannot face is that this fact remains true regardless of slavery's legal status or not.

CEOS: 'WE'RE NOT USING SLAVES, TRUST US'

The hopelessness of this kind of capitalist response to modern slavery typified by these bureaucrats is also reflected in corporate modern slavery statements. The Modern Slavery Act (2018) requires business entities earning over $100m in revenue per annum to publish yearly reports on slavery risks relevant to their operations. The reports themselves are largely HR-department blather, but also contain revealing insights into the workings of the anti-slavery industry.

The 2022 slavery report for JB Hi-Fi is a good example. Since JB does not directly employ slaves, most of the report is focused on "slavery risks" in the retail supply chain – suppliers and distributors in the developing world. Largely, the point of this is to comply with the law, and to reassure any potentially worried investors that all is well. A substantial amount of the report is spent on toothless liaising with suppliers. In the 2022 report, JB was proud to note that suppliers are now required to make sure that their employees' wages are "enough for basic living needs with residual income for discretionary spending". This is something that JB doesn't even guarantee for its own staff, the majority of whom are on the lowest level of the retail award.

According to the JB report, the most common audit of their suppliers is the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) Audit. Infamously, a BSCI audit of a group of factories in Savar, Bangladesh was carried out by a subsidiary of the German-based TÜV Rheinland. Not long after this audit was completed and the factories certified, the building housing the factories, Rana Plaza, collapsed, killing 1134 people.

The dark hidden shame of Australia: slavery persists

Not only can we not deal with slavery which exists today, Australia still denies and fights against the need for reparations for the slavery of our past. The new focus on 'modern' slavery is an attempt to bury our heads in the sand regarding the prevalence of slavery and hyper-exploitation worldwide and our role in creating and perpetuating slavery historically.

In 2020, only a few days after tens of thousands of Australians marched during the Covid pandemic for Black Lives Matter, then-Prime Minister Scott Morrison gave a radio interview making the extraordinary claim that there has never been slavery in the history of colonial Australia. As well as the fact that many Aboriginal people perform slave labour while being incarcerated in prisons today, Australia has a long and potted history of slavery across the continent.

Australian states were direct administrators of slavery in Australia, and Indigenous Australians were enslaved until the 1970s. This legal, state-administered slavery only ended in the 1970s, and functioned under laws which allowed state governments to withhold the wages of Aboriginal workers for private labour that they undertook, meaning those wages were stolen. Australia's fifth-largest class action lawsuit ever took on the Queensland government over the question of stolen wages concerning a period of four decades; despite it being calculated that 500 million dollars of wages were stolen in this period, the settlement for the case was read to be 190 million dollars. Many other class action cases against state governments have either failed or are still taking place. That these practices happened up until the 70s means that these questions are not generationally abstract for Indigenous Australians. The role of the Australian state in the continuation of slavery and its consequences has never been broken.

This is the crucial point that busts apart the liberal desire to distance traditional slavery and modern slavery. The assumption that the legal status of slave owning causes a shift in the political representation and strength of slave owners within a political system is false, as the law does not magically grant political power, representation and strength to the survivors of slavery and their progeny. They grind on, appealing to the courts without ever receiving true justice in return. Both the slave owner and corporations are capitalists, and the workers, in forced or waged labour, are still fucked.

> **"Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, the discourse pertaining to modern slavery is dominated by the richest billionaires in our country."**

Sex workers: the collateral damage of the modern slavery pushback

Since the advent of tabloid press and debates around responses to slavery, sex work and sex workers have been inflicted with extreme punishment by governments seeking to appear like they are doing something in response to the political problem of slavery. The 'white slavery' panic is perhaps the first example of this. With no labour rights or welfare for women following the Industrial Revolution, sex work was highly visible in Victorian England. After a highly sensational piece by W T Stead was published entitled "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon". fearmongering about supposed trafficking of white women led to a public protest in Hyde Park, London in 1885 and the passing of what became colloquially known as the Stead Act (after the article's author), which toughened legislation around the punishment of sex work.

Fast forward to Australia and we see Channel 9/Fairfax producing a tabloid series and subsequent Stan documentary called 'Trafficked', which replays the 'trafficked women' moral panic, but this time as the white saviour for Asian women. The series portrays Asian sex workers as the hapless victims of traffickers who lock them into debt bondage through fraudulent visa promises, despite the fact that many of the workers depicted in the series are known not to be in these situations. The documentary uses footage obtained without the women's consent for their bodies and advertisements to be shown, to the huge distress of those whom Fairfax blatantly exploits in the pursuit of gutter journalism. In the wake of this series a former Victorian cop cooked up the 'Nixon Report', which put forward the proposal that no Australian visa should allow an individual to work in the sex industry. This would have the opposite effect on the prevalence of trafficking – women trapped in coercive arrangements of sexual servitude already do not report their enslavement due to the fear of being deported, and passing such a law would justify that fear completely. It will also criminalise the work of all migrant sex workers, expanding the power that the AFP have over their work and welfare. The parallels between Stead's article and Act, and McKenzies documentary and foreshadowed legislative changes are obvious. The tactics and obfuscations that capitalists use when approaching slavery are attempts to hide themselves as the root cause, and have not changed in 150 years. It is not hard to believe that from this, a Labor government may choose to take on sex workers as law-and-order collateral, in order to appeal to a conservative base.

Sex workers have not had to wait for such concrete legislative changes to the legality of their work to feel the impact of the 'modern slavery' discussion. As Scarlet Alliance have pointed out in their criticism and the hasty implementation of the Modern Slavery Act 2018, many companies, eager to put an anti-slavery gloss onto their exploitative activities, have begun to make promises to discriminate against sex workers to wash their hands clean of any accusations of sex trafficking. Accor hotels have said they will not rent rooms out to workers, and mining companies have said they will refuse FIFO sex workers operating in company towns or worksites.

Conclusion

The ruling class will often misdirect attention away from legitimate crises by punishing a section of the working class as a cautionary tale. The neoliberal crocodile tears regarding 'modern slavery' is a clear example of this. Exploitation in our workplaces and in situations of slavery may differ in degree, but it does not differ in kind. We share a common enemy, and we must be united in rejecting false and dangerous neoliberal solutions to one of the fundamental problems of capitalism.

Fighting the exploitation of unpaid student placements

Why capitalism relies on the free labour of students to function

THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATION IS widely regarded as a positive and empowering journey, promising individuals the essential tools to enhance their intellectual capacities and make valuable contributions to society. However, beneath the facade of opportunity lies a darker reality – the issue of student exploitation. From the staggering burden of student debt to the unsettling commodification of knowledge, the education system perpetuates a distressing cycle of exploitation, benefitting the capitalist class at the expense of the proletariat. By understanding how the capitalist class utilises this great social injustice, the working class can strive for a more equitable and inclusive society that truly empowers all individuals to revel in the fruits of their labour, free from exploitation and oppression.

Envisioning a utopian model of education sheds light on the exploitative nature of the current economic system, where students are often overworked, underpaid, and regularly subjected to unpaid labour as a core component of their 'learning'. It is appalling to continuously hear the Labor government providing lip service to the working class, only for this so-called "workers party" to gain power and maintain the status quo at the expense of the working class, for the benefit of the bosses. The vast majority of student placements in degrees like social work, education and health are in government agencies, whether public schools and hospitals or the Department of Communities & Justice. The Labor state government has a direct role in the rampant exploitation of students who are required to work unpaid for hundreds of hours each in the public sector, often with very little opportunity for real learning beyond what a regular employee would pick up when they begin a new job. There are often excuses made that public funding is just not available, but with a federal Labor government behind the various Labor states, these excuses are wearing thin. The money is there, the issue is not going away, and every sitting week of parliament that does not address this issue pushes students further into poverty.

THE REALITY OF PLACEMENT

The extent of these placement requirements in various degrees is staggering. Social work students must complete 1000 hours of vocational training, with no opportunity to apply for allowances in recognition of prior learning or qualifications. Nursing students are required to complete 800 hours, and most other health qualifications require a similar commitment either within the undergraduate qualification or as part of postgraduate accreditation. Undergraduate teaching students must complete at least 80 days in the classroom, which amounts to around 500 hours at minimum, with some institutions like the University of Sydney seeking to expand this requirement to include a 10-week practicum as the final year internship.

Crucially, no one denies the importance of practical learning as part of vocational training or higher education – the chance to gain pre-service experience in schools and hospitals is critical in building the skills required to work effectively in these sectors. What is opposed is the requirement to complete these placement hours without any form of financial support and without the recognition that what occurs during these hours is work, whether a student is learning from their experience or not. As a result of the current staff shortages in key industries, many students have reported that they are treated like volunteers or interns on their placements rather than students, often carrying out demanding, repetitive, or emotionally involved labour which should be conducted by paid staff. As the pressure on students mounts, universities need to realise that learning does not have to come at the expense of pay, workplace rights, and fair treatment.

> **"No one denies the importance of practical learning as part of vocational training... What is opposed is the requirement to complete these placement hours without any form of financial support and without the recognition that what occurs during these hours is work."**

The pressure on students is amplified by the steadily increasing cost of living in Australia. Many students find themselves grappling with the consequences of the commodification of human rights such as food, electricity, and housing. To truly belittle them further, students are faced with a 7.1% rise to our student debts, lumping many workers with debt increases this year, despite many having contributed thousands of dollars to their principal repayments. Unsurprisingly, this has forced many into insecure work rife with exploitation and wage theft. Students are forced to work additional hours without payment, constantly battling with their boss to recover stolen wages, tips and benefits. If they dare to stand up to their employer it is often at the threat of unemployment, poverty and homelessness. This is no accident, under the capitalist structure these students are systematically manipulated into exploitation as a feature of this system.

This cycle of exploitation occurs to keep working class students desperate, insecure, and willing to take on work which regularly pays below the federally mandated minimum wage. Naturally one will ask, who benefits from keeping the next generation of highly educated individuals so destitute? That answer is, of course, the bosses who attempt to engineer society in any way to suppress wages, cut costs and increase profits.

Most jobs available to students offer minimal wages, limited benefits, and little job security. Employers may take advantage of the large pool of students seeking employment, knowing that many will accept any job regardless of its exploitative conditions. This leads to a cycle of student exploitation, where students are forced into precarious work merely to survive. The requirement for student placements to be unpaid is a natural consequence of this logic; of course employers (including the state) would jump at the chance to take on free labour! Unfortunately, many university course coordinators and heads of department have swallowed this logic without question, and some now vociferously defend the importance of keeping placements unpaid to preserve their role as 'learning' opportunities.

It is unsurprising to learn that this oppression disproportionately affects communities which have been brutalised and oppressed by the bosses and the state. How is a single mother expected to ever achieve higher education when the cost of education, which now also includes the huge burden of unpaid placement hours, is so immense? How are First Nations peoples able to acquire these qualifications when the state

monopoly on violence is routinely used to strip them of their wealth, land and communities?

A CRISIS OF CAPITALISM

The systemic injustice that occurs through mandated unpaid work placements in the higher education sector is a prime example of bosses taking advantage of the desire for practical education opportunities to entrench a system of institutionally mandated free labour. Charging students thousands of dollars to provide their labour without remuneration is reprehensible. Many students are forced to cease their current employment to undertake these placements. Others are forced to discard their dreams of achieving a tertiary education or live in extreme poverty while completing their degree. This is a blatant form of wealth-based gatekeeping, ensuring only the wealthiest of students who can rely on the capital of their parents are able to effectively achieve higher qualifications. This illustrates the age-old cycle of capitalists ensuring that the working class are barred from education and "class mobility" by cloaking meaningful advancement behind a wall of status and wealth.

Even the working-class students who have survived this intense exploitation of their labour must ask themselves, at what cost? They have skipped meals, missed rent, years of their life undoubtedly lost from the impact of stress and their interest in life whittled away by the draining reality of poverty. Despite these enormous hurdles, resilient and relentless members of the working class choose to subject themselves to extensive exploitation at the hands of the ruling class solely to expand their knowledge and entertain the dream of class mobility and ascending to the fabled "middle class".

Eighty years on from the creation of this mythical class status, we now know the middle class does not truly exist for workers. It is only those sometimes referred to as the 'petite bourgeoisie' born into wealth or willing to exploit the labours of others that are able to fabricate claims about the hard work required to accumulate their wealth. It is a depressing thought that every year thousands of students will experience irreversible damage to their physical and mental health, and accumulate lifelong debt in a desperate attempt to be freed of their exploitation. This begs the question, surely the Labor party is aware of this? The party of trade unionists and "socialists" must surely be acting with great haste to rectify this injustice!

Of course, the federal Labor government acknowledges the severity of student poverty, yet insists on dealing with this as a 'long-term challenge' through the University Accord. The Accord is populated by an amalgam of businesses and corporate university executives. Unsurprisingly, these groups do not have the interest of the working class at heart, they only desire to expand their ludicrous accumulation of capital by manipulating the university experience. The power to make change is given to the same group of people who profit from wage suppression, unpaid labour, and stolen wages. The same people who created a system where students will accrue thousands of dollars in debt to toil without remuneration, are expected to fix this issue.

"The federal Labor government acknowledges the severity of student poverty, yet insists on dealing with this as a 'long-term challenge' through the University Accord... The power to make change is given to the same group of people who profit from wage suppression, unpaid labour, and stolen wages. The same people who created a system where students will accrue thousands of dollars in debt to toil without remuneration, are expected to fix this issue."

WORKERS AND STUDENTS MUST TAKE BACK CONTROL!

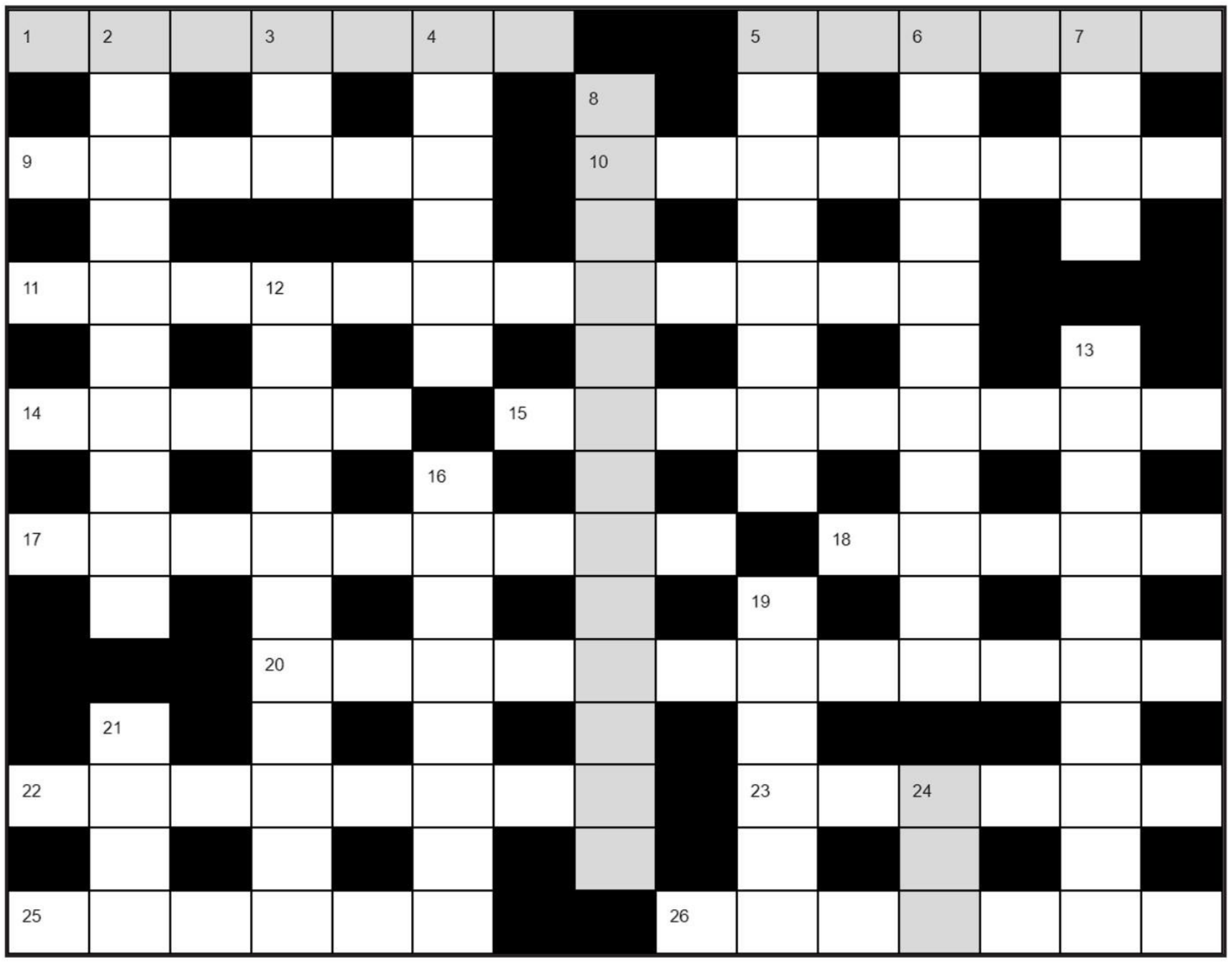
This situation raises a broader issue about the influence of the capitalist class on the lives of the working class, including students. Allowing corporate interests to dictate solutions for student poverty could perpetuate a system that prioritises profit over the well-being of the most vulnerable members of society. While no doubt the Accord panel will work tirelessly to create innovative, market-driven solutions such as corporate subsidies, corporate tax breaks and perhaps even indentured servitude to satiate the beast of the free market, it is unlikely they will create a single solution that will meaningfully uplift impoverished students. If they do, it will only be because students and workers made these solutions unavoidable through mass protest and workplace struggle. Only students and workers collaborating in solidarity to find a meaningful solution to address this exploitation can succeed.

It is obvious that those who are impacted by an issue would naturally have the insight and knowledge available to resolve the problem. This is a core principle of anarchism and socialism more broadly – that workers themselves must drive the reform of the current system as they alone know what is required at the workplace and community level. It is impossible to imagine a world where workers decide to impose a $50,000 debt on themselves merely for their own 'self-improvement'. Likewise, it is impossible to imagine workers electing to arbitrarily increase that debt during a cost-of-living crisis, as the Labor government did in July of this year.

It is only due to the immense capital we generate for the capitalist class that they enforce systemic exploitation and oppression upon us. This is a fact workers must always remember when the corporate executives elect to starve you, leave you without shelter, and refuse to help so they can expand their luxuries, hoard their wealth, and abstain from partaking in meaningful labour. Should we choose to withhold our labour, the capitalist will be left with nothing. The struggles we face today are not impossible to solve, they are not even difficult to solve. There is one solution, revolution.

In a revolutionary society run by the working class, for the working class, nothing will stand in our way of abolishing unpaid labour, exploitation, and burdensome student debt. Students would not find themselves going hungry as the commodification of food will be abolished, nor will they find themselves homeless, exhausted and exploited. We have been raised in a society where mass collective action and militant unionism is mostly a distant memory, confined to the annals of history books. While the task of seizing power from the capitalist class may seem unfathomable, it is of the utmost importance that we as workers remember: we already run society. The capitalists only exist as a parasitic class to exploit our labour. The only thing we need to do is reclaim our labour for our own ambitions.

MUTINY! crossword corner



What is Black Flag Sydney?

Black Flag Sydney is a collective of anarchist-communist workers who organise mainly on unceded Gadigal land.

Our ultimate goal is to build a society free of states, classes and currency, in order to achieve collective self- emancipation and universal freedom for all. Direct action is our method and worker self-management is our vision for today and the future.

We aim not only to dismantle systems of capitalist exploitation, but to build the capacity for people to freely and truly self-manage their workplaces, communities, and lives.

Find the answers to our crossword on the Black Flag Sydney website

ACROSS

1 See 8-down
5 See 8-down
9 First name of US President who succeeded JFK (6)
10 Provoking or annoying (8)
11 The act of removing a monarch (12)
14 Last name of Black prison abolitionist, formerly a member of the CPUSA, who wrote Are Prisons Obsolete? (5)
15 Cute, lovable (9)
17 To hit, to strike (9)
18 A type of computer code where letters and symbols are encoded into numbers (1,1,1,1,1)
20 A personality trait making an individual outgoing and highly sociable (12)
22 Youngest child of King Lear (8)
23 Bodily organ; bean (6)
25 Pronouns of 14-across, 22-across, 7-down, 19-down, and 3-down's leader (3/3)
26 How many children you could have under a Chairman Mao policy that ended in 2016 (4,3)

DOWN

2 The lungs make blood _____ (10)
3 German Communist Party during the Weimar Republic (1,1,1)
4 In Inuit religion, the god who was master of bears (6)
5 At any time (8)
6 Equips a place with soldiers and weapons (11)
7 First name of Black American singer who wrote the protest song Mississippi Goddam about the murder of Emmett Till (4)
***8, 1-across, 5-across, 24-down** A time to celebrate 14-across, 7-down, 19-down, and the leader of 3-down (but not 22-across)? (13,7,6,3)
12 Incredibly narrow (11)
13 Referring to a place on the opposite side of the world (11)
16 Someone who goes on and on and on (8)
19 Last name of German revolutionary who was a member of 3-down, co-founder of the Spartacist league, and close friend of the leader of 3-down (6)
21 US oligarchic and fossil fuel company owning family (4)
24 See 8-down

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* The asterisked clue is a single 4-word answer that goes over 4 different parts of the crossword (8 down, 1 across, 5 across, and 24 down). The bracketed numbers at the end of the clue represent the length of each word. The clue refers to other answers in the grid that must be solved to find the answer. This clue also is also the theme of the overall crossword.